

CYCLE OF THE MACHINE

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EXT. PARKING LOT - LAUNDROMAT - NIGHT

Torrential downpour. A WOMAN, MARA (30s) runs to a LAUNDROMAT. She's holding 2 laundry baskets. In the middle of the parking lot sits the laundromat, off-place... *

INT. LAUNDROMAT - SECONDS LATER

Mara enters the laundromat, shakes her head. rain comes flying off her hair. She seems clearly frustrated. *

The walls are pastel, like teal, peach and lavender, slightly faded.

Wallpaper: A dated geometric pattern with zigzags, circles, and triangles in neon accents.

Old, faded advertisements for laundry detergent and soda with cheesy taglines and smiling families are stuck to the wall ("Get Your Clothes Squeaky Clean-Like Magic!" and "Pop into happiness with every fizz!"). *

The place is empty except for a CUSTODIAN (50's, male), a toothy smile on his face. *

CUSTODIAN
You came just in time.

Mara smiles awkwardly, nods. *

She notices a dryer running with no one around. *

TIGHT ON the clock stuck at 3:33. *

a vending machine offering nonsensical items like toothbrushes, soap, a spoon, packs of glitter, shoes and pairs of handcuffs. *

MOMENTS LATER

Mara stands in front of one of the washing machines, puts her laundry basket down, starts loading her laundry. Socks, shirts, pants... *

BEEP! *

The washing machine starts, shakes heavier than all the other washing machines. *

She looks at the machine, confused.

The custodian catches her confused look. *

CUSTODIAN

Is everything alright, ma'am.

She turns around to the custodian.

MARA

Yea--Yes, I'm okay.

She turns back, looks confused again.

SHORT MOMENT LATER

Mara sits back on the waiting chair, staring in front of her bored.

The custodian again, his toothy grin wider.

She softly sneers at him. he doesn't seem to notice.

She spots a magazine and picks it up: Vanity Fair.

She looks at the cover. On the cover: Billie Eilish with a pastel green text overlaid that says: "BILLIE'S WORLD".

On the left other names are mentioned such as: Kobe Bryant, The Beatles, Nikole Hannah-Jones, Ariana Grande and Demi Moore.

She flips through the pages: An interview with Demi Moore, Advertisements for laundry detergents, An interview with Ariana Grande including links to her hit singles.

She sighs, puts the magazine down.

She notices the custodian still staring at her. He still has the same toothy grin.

MARA

Can I help you?

The custodian's smile grows wider.

CUSTODIAN

With what?

She shakes her head softly.

MARA

I don't--

She turns her head to the her washing machine

It's shaking more heavily than before.

MARA

(re: washing machine)

Is there... A problem? Y'know, With
the...

*
*

CUSTODIAN

Oh... Don't worry about them,
ma'am. They have a life of their
own sometimes. Just let them do
their thing.

*
*

Mara nods uncomfortably, still a little frustrated.

*

LATER

*

Mara walks towards the washing machine and checks it out,
seeing if something's wrong.

She opens the door of the machine, it stops shaking. She sees
that half of her clothes are missing: socks, shirts, pants,
bras...

*

She calls the custodian for help in a calmly urgent tone.

MARA

Excuse me? Some of my clothes are
missing.

The same toothy grin.

CUSTODIAN

Don't worry, ma'am... They'll show
soon.

MARA

What do you mean "They'll show
soon", Are you sure? Because it
doesn't seem like I'll see them
back anytime soon.

*
*

CUSTODIAN

Like I said, ma'am. They have a
life of their own. Let *them* do the
work, and you relax.

*

Mara turns back to the washing machine, mutters:

*

MARA

Yeah right.

She notices something under her clothes. It seems like the
corner of a brown, paper rectangle

*

She hesitates before pushing away the clothes, revealing a brown, paper rectangle. *

She picks it up.

On the paper: A pentagram.

She looks around. Her eyes fall on two BOYS, probably around 9-11 years old. They're giggling. That swiftly comes to an end when they notice Mara looking at them. *

She looks at them with a mix of suspicion and confusion, tilts her head a bit. *

Next to the boys sits a WOMAN (30s) who is wearing a white bride's dress which seems to fall a bit long. *

The Bride is humming something eerie, smiles as she folds her socks in a strange way: She folds them 2 times vertically and 3 times horizontally. *

Mara walks up to the Bride, ticks her on the shoulder. *

The Bride looks up at Mara, smiles friendly and warmly. *

THE BRIDE

Hmm?

MARA

(apologetically)

I'm really sorry to bother, but are those your kids over there?

Mara points to the two boys who are drawing on pieces of paper, the same one she found. *

THE BRIDE

Oh, yes, they are. Aren't they sweet?

Mara nods awkwardly. *

MARA

Actually, I found this hidden beneath my clothes, and I was wondering if I should be worried. *

Mara hands the Bride the paper with the pentagram on it. The Bride laughs.

THE BRIDE

Oh, god. No, you don't have to worry. They just like drawing stuff and bothering people.

MARA

...Well, I mean, it's a *pentagram*,
so...

THE BRIDE

(reassuring)

I can assure you your safety. They
barely know what a pentagram is,
and besides, kids can get wild when
it comes to imagination sometimes,
you know how kids are.

*
*

Mara's face softens, as if the "you know how kids are" hit a
snare.

*
*

BEEEEEEEEEP!

The first round of laundry is done. She walks to the washing
machine, opens the machine's door.

*
*

All of her missing laundry is back.

She looks at it, confused.

MARA

(muttering)

What the...

Mara looks around, sees the custodian, walks towards him.

*

MARA

How is this possible? What
happened?

CUSTODIAN

Nothing happened, ma'am. The
machine did it's work.

MARA

A washing machine doesn't magically
make my clothes disappear and then
reappear again. That's not how
washing machine's work.

The custodian grins wider than before.

CUSTODIAN

I'm sorry you're not enjoying our
services, ma'am. Is there anything
else I could do for you?

MARA

Yeah, I want you to tell me what
the *fuck* is happening.

A beat.

CUSTODIAN

I'm afraid I cannot do that.

LATER

Mara sits in her chair again, exhausted, a pile of clothes next to her and she starts folding.

We fade from clip to clip. Every clip, the pile on her lap gets bigger, but the pile she's been grabbing the clothes from has a new piece of clothing appearing everytime she takes one off

LATER

It looks like it has been hours. Mara seems visually exhausted, her folding has now slowed down.

She looks at the clock: 3:33AM. She looks at it confused. The time hasn't changed a second.

A new group of patrons has formed. They all seem unaffected and keep on performing their tasks: folding, keeping their children under control.

She puts all her now-clean laundry in the basket, stands up, pays no attention to the dirty laundry stack, walks out the door.

She walks through the door, but... It leads into the same laundromat.

She looks confused. She closes the door to check, and from the original side it looks like it leads to the parking lot. She opens it and it again reveals the same laundromat.

She walks into the duplicate laundromat, quickly walks to the duplicate door, opens it, just to get led into yet another duplicate.

She tries the doors 5 more times, gives up.

The two boys from earlier tick her on the shoulder, she quickly turns around, startled. They have the same toothy grin as the custodian.

Suddenly a baby toy (a wooden magnetic bear stack-up toy) knocks into her head. She clutches her head, groans in pain.

MARA

The fuck!...

All of the washing machines start acting up, shaking, the doors clapping open and shut. *

A loud BUZZZZ comes from the machines.

All of the patrons seem unaffected yet again. *

The machines begin spitting out strange items: Baby toys, a tie, and a damp, golden wedding invitation fluttering through the air. *

Mara screams, her mouth wide open. The two boys start giggling and playing in this rain of random items. *

The items start falling onto other patrons, some of the sharp objects impaling them. They still seem unbothered and unaffected. *

MARA
WHAT THE FUCK!!!

Everything abruptly stops, including Mara's scream. Her mouth remains wide open.

Everything looks neat and clean. No blood, no toys, no other stuff. It all went back to like it was before. *

In front of her feet lay the perfectly placed golden wedding invitation, damp and faded. *

She picks it up and flips the card around, revealing the front of it. On it is her name and her husband's name (PETER) in a fancy cursive font.

Quick flashback: *

INT. HOUSE - DAY *

Mara sits at the table with a pen and a wooden card. She writes the invitation. On the cover of the card she writes "MARA & PETER" in the same fancy cursive font we saw before. *

BACK TO: *

INT. LAUNDROMAT - NIGHT *

Mara looks at the card with a slightly frightened but also mourning expression. *

Suddenly the Bride grabs the invitation card, smiles at Mara. *

THE BRIDE

You can't leave until it's done,
Mara. But it's never really done,
is it?

The Bride laughs uncontrollably. *

Scared, Mara runs to the door and opens it again. the
custodian is right in front of her face when she runs into
another duplicate laundromat. *

CUSTODIAN

I advise you to finish the load
before you leave.

The custodian's toothy grin is now unnaturally wide.

Mara's eyes go glossy and her expression turns bland. A white
glow grows in front of her. It looks as if her soul is slowly
detaching from her body. *

EXT. WEDDING FIELD - FLASHBACK (DAY)

NOTE: This scene must be in slow-mo.

Police lights over black.

OPEN ON the exterior of a nice suburban house, the police
lights reflecting on its walls.

The door opens, revealing PETER (30, male) in handcuffs and a
POLICE OFFICER (late 30s, female) escorts him out of the
home.

Mara runs after him, tries to pull him out of the police
officer's hold, fails. *

Peter looks back at Mara one last time, enters the police
car. *

Mara screams while crying, banging on the glass.

Peter puts his hand against the glass, mouths: "I'M SORRY. I
LOVE YOU." *

She mouths "I LOVE YOU TOO." back. *

The car drives away, Mara watches as it does so *

Then...

She slowly sinks into the ground, crying, screaming. She
sinks until she enters:

INT. LIVING ROOM - MARA'S HOUSE - FLASHBACK (DAY)

The living room is small, messy. Laundry baskets, toys, and papers, scattered everywhere. Mara holds a crying baby, leaning against the counter, a phone pressed to her ear.

MARA
(quietly)
I can't come in tonight. I don't
have anyone to watch him.

The crying gets louder. Mara looks exhausted as she listens to the person on the other line.

MARA
I said I'll figure it out.

She ends the call, sits on the floor, holding the baby close. Her eyes wander to a dryer in the corner of the room spinning clothes endlessly.

She sinks into the ground again until she enters:

INT. MARA'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - EVENING

The apartment is dimly lit, cluttered but cozy.

Mara is tossing clothes into the dryer while her young SON (4 years old) clutches a small stuffed animal: a worn-out Bunny with floppy ears.

SON
Mommy, don't forget bun-bun! He's
dirty.

He waves his hand in front his nose and giggles.

Mara smiles, distracted. she grabs the bunny from him.

MARA
Okay, okay. Bun-Bun's getting a
bath.

SON
Mommy?

MARA
Hmm?

A beat.

SON
Will it wash all the love away?

Mara chuckles lightheartedly. *

She gets on her knees, faces her son, puts her hands on his cheeks. *

MARA *

It won't, baby. Don't worry. *

A MOMENT LATER *

She tosses the bunny into the dryer with the rest of the clothes, shuts the door. *

The boy smiles, satisfied. *

INT. MARA'S APARTMENT - LATER *

Mara pulls the clothes out of the dryer. Her smile fades when she sees the bunny. *

It's shrunken, misshapen, scorched in places. One of its floppy ears hangs by a thread. *

Her son stands in the doorway, his face falling when he sees it. *

SON *

(quietly) *

Bun-Bun? *

Mara freezes, holding the ruined bunny. *

MARA *

I-... I'm... I'm sorry, sweetie. *

Her son's eyes fill with tears. *

He sniffles, grabs the bunny, runs to his room, shutting the door behind him. *

Mara sinks to the floor, clutching a shirt from the laundry, covers her face. *

INT. LAUNDROMAT - NIGHT *

The flashback fades. Mara now sits at the waiting chair, her face sweaty. She blinks, looks down. In her lap is the same stuffed bunny, still ruined, its ear barely hanging on. *

The hum of the machines is louder, almost deafening. *

Mara storms up to the custodian who is peacefully mopping the floor near a row of dryers. *

The lights above flicker erratically, casting an unsettling glow over the space.

The hum of the machines seems to grow louder, a low, constant buzz.

Mara's breath is quick and ragged as she approaches him, her hands clenched into fists. *

MARA

What is this place? Why am I here?

The custodian doesn't respond immediately. He continues to mop, his slow, deliberate motions looks almost mechanical. *

After a long pause, he looks up at her, his expression tired but calm. *

CUSTODIAN

You're here because you brought yourself here, Mara. *

Mara's expression turns slightly more furious. She steps closer, her voice rising.

MARA

That doesn't make sense. This place... none of this is real. I've seen things—things I can't explain.

The custodian stops mopping, letting the mop rest against the floor. He wipes his brow, his eyes never leaving her.

CUSTODIAN

You think you're the only one?

Mara falters, her anger momentarily overshadowed by confusion.

MARA

What do you mean?

The custodian looks past her, as if seeing something she can't.

CUSTODIAN

Everyone here is stuck. Trapped by their own burdens. Their own unresolved cycles. It's never-ending. You can't leave until you finish yours.

Mara recoils slightly.

*

MARA

What are you talking about? How
could... How could I be trapped?
I'm not like them. I'm not stuck.

The custodian steps closer, his voice soft but firm.

CUSTODIAN

You think you're different? You
think you can just walk away
without facing what you've left
behind?

Mara shakes her head, tears welling up in her eyes.

MARA

I don't know what you're
saying. I... I didn't leave
anything behind.

*

CUSTODIAN

* You've been running, Mara.
* Running from everything. From
* the things you've done. The
* things you've avoided. The
* people you've hurt.

*

*

*

*

*

*

Mara stares at him, disbelief in her eyes.

MARA

What--so what are you saying, that
this is hell or something?

*

*

The custodian looks at her, not denying it.

*

MARA

No. No, I haven't hurt anyone. I'm
just... I'm just trying to survive.
(through tears)
I don't deserve this.

*

*

*

The custodian's eyes soften, a small, sad smile playing on
his lips.

CUSTODIAN

We all think that. But we don't get
to decide. This place doesn't care
about your reasons. It only cares
about your burden.

The laundromat's hum grows louder.

Mara looks around, her face pale.

MARA

How do I get out?

The custodian gestures to the rows of dryers. *

CUSTODIAN

You can't leave until you stop
running, Mara, until you face what
you've been avoiding, that you
accept what you've done and keep
doing *over and over* again. *

Mara shakes her head again, desperate, scared. *

MARA

I don't even know what I'm supposed
to face, what are you talking
about? *

The custodian gives a long, heavy sigh. He walks to one of
the dryers, opens it slowly. Inside, a bundle of laundry
shifts, the clothes tumbling. *

CUSTODIAN

You'll know when the time comes.
Until then, you'll stay here, and
the cycle will keep turning. When
you've proven yourself, you'll go
to the above. *

Mara looks at the dryer, her face tightens. *

MARA

(whispering, crying
softly) *

I don't want to be stuck. *

The custodian looks at her for a moment, his expression
unreadable. *

he turns away, resuming his slow mopping of the floor. *

CUSTODIAN

No one does. But it doesn't matter
what you want. *

Mara stands there, frozen. The hum of the laundromat grows
louder. *

Mara seems frustrated by the hum. Anger starts building up. *

She starts smashing the washing machines, screaming. *

The custodian doesn't budge and continues to slowly mop.

MARA

SHUT THE FUCK UP! *

She gets into a frog squat, starts opening the machine's door, throws laundry all over the place, over patrons that, again, don't seem bothered by it. They continue to fold their laundry. *
*
*

MARA
GET ME OUT OF HERE!

After all the laundry is out and the machine is completely beat up, she fully sinks to her knees and cries, screams.

MARA
(softly, through tears)
Why me?
(softer)
God, why me... *

The custodian softly speaks up.

CUSTODIAN
Have you tried the Lost and Found?

Mara looks up at the custodian. *

CUT TO:

Mara is now at the reception table, her face exhausted and tired. On it is a box, labeled "LOST AND FOUND". *
*

She sticks her hand into the box, digs deep in the box, her expression not changing. *
*

She feels something. *

She pulls it out of the box. It is the same stuffed animal bunny her son had, the one she had shrunk, but now cleaner, as new.

The stuffed animal sheds a tear. So does Mara. She slowly embraces the bunny.

MARA
(softly)
My baby...

After a short moment she looks at the bunny, wipes away a tear. *
*

MARA
I'm so sorry, baby. For everything
I've done to you. What I have
passed down to you. *

The Bride gently takes the bunny from Mara. *

She looks around and the laundromat is filled with columns of women, all sitting cross-legged. *

They are folding clothes in unison. *

Mara nods softly, sits down in a cross-legged position too. *

She closes her eyes, takes a deep breath. *

The bride hands Mara a pile of unfolded laundry. She takes the pile of clothes, looks at the Bride with a slight smile, a tear running down her cheek. *

THE BRIDE

This is what you were made for.

Mara softly nods again. *

CUT TO:

EXT. LAUNDROMAT - NIGHT *

We zoom out into the air, we see millions of laundromats all lined up, inside of all of them are lines of women folding laundry. *

FADE TO BLACK. *

THE END